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## A CENTURY OF WASHINGTON IRVING

The outlines of Washington Irving's life are simple. His first thirty-two years were spent, except for a year and a half in Europe, in and about New York, where he was born. The seventeen years following were spent in Europe, chiefly in England and Spain. Then ten years at Sunnyside were followed by four more years in Spain as American minister. The last thirteen, again at Sunnyside, terminated in 1859.

In this lifetime Irving published more than a score of books. *Salmagundi* and the *Knickerbocker History of New York* represent the first period of humorous interest in local manners and history. The *Sketch Book*, *Bracebridge Hall*, and *Tales of a Traveller* represent what may be called the English period; the *Life of Columbus*, the *Conquest of Grenada*, the *Companions of Columbus*, and the *Alhambra*, all had their source in Spain. After the first return, *Astoria* represented a new interest in our own West. After the second, the *Life of Mahomet* returned to Spain and the Moors; *Wolfert's Roost* to the note of the *Sketch Book*. The lives of Goldsmith and Washington complete the author's concluding labors.

The central character of the *Sketch Book*, as Irving's most famous and most generally representative piece of work, justifies the attention that it has received. Its thirty-four papers classify themselves at the outset into half a dozen groups,—autobiographical, notes of racial and of national traits, excursions into literary criticism, descriptions of places and things, studies of manners and customs, and experiments in fiction. The last are, by common consent, the most important; but the others, also, reward attention.

The first two pieces and the last in the book are autobiographical. According to "The Author's Account of Himself", he prizes chiefly variety, picturesqueness, and distinction. Not finding these in the America of his day, except in landscape, he seeks them in Europe, in historical and literary associations, in cultivated manners and ancient customs. Art, also, is mentioned incidentally as a source of interest, but Irving's knowledge

of art was really very small. He further appreciates the youthful promise of his native country, but he would rather escape "from the commonplace realities of the present" and lose himself among "the shadowy grandeur of the past". Irving's conception of the past will be examined later, but it is early obvious that for him, as for Emerson, literature is an "effort of man to indemnify himself for the wrongs of his condition". This indemnity Irving finds in feeling, in fancy, in romance. For the time he becomes one of Mr. Henry James's "certain sort of American who must inevitably live in Europe". This mood may be youthful, but it is fundamental and universal, and the desire to satisfy it through travel amounts, Mr. James thinks, to a characteristically American trait.

In the second paper, "The Voyage", the familiarity of the material makes it easy to observe the author's manner of treatment. It, like all of the other papers, is prefaced by a poetical quotation, according to the good, old, leisurely fashion that immediately enlarges the picture by suggesting its setting in a rich frame of association. The musical effect of polysyllables, both in themselves and in combination, is noticeable at the outset. The first paragraph presents its argument in such words as,—*"the temporary absence of employment during the voyage is an excellent and imperceptible preparative for novelty in impressions from the populace of the other hemisphere."* The movement is thus at times elaborate and almost pompous, with parallelism and contrast, alliteration and cumulation. Thus the voyage "interposes a gulf not merely imaginary, but real, between us and our homes—a gulf subject to tempest, and fear, and uncertainty, rendering distance palpable and return precarious". But the movement, however elaborate, is always flowing, thanks to a gift for harmonious adjustment and melodious sequence of sound, and to a predominance of long, loose sentences, sufficiently varied by short, simple, rapid statements of observation or records of experience. Day dream, reverie and meditation, are prevalent, but always punctuated by suggestions of actual sensations. These sensations are often muscular, sometimes of temperature, frequently of hearing, but most frequently of sight,—of vision, often vivid, but oftenmost atmospheric,

with more sense for space than for line, and much more for light than for color. There are many little pictures of large things here,—as throughout Irving,—the tranquil sea, for example, with piles of golden clouds above the undulating billows, or the tumble of the porpoise, the heave of the grampus, and the dart of the shark through the blue water. The sketcher's brush is free but it is also sufficiently firm, with often a sure selection of detail like that of the image in the closed eye after a vivid impression. It is fortunate that Irving's predominant eye-mindedness had such range for he, like Wordsworth, had scarcely any nose,—in twenty pages on "The Christmas Dinner", for example, he gives us never a whiff and only a taste or two. It is but fair to say, however, that Ichabod Crane somewhat makes up the gustatory balance.

Thus, through Irving's style also, as one always may, we approach the author and his attitude,—a leisurely man of refined rather than cultivated tastes, yet alive with sensations, and especially gifted in vision. He follows, it is true, a tradition of fine writing, but with such a natural grace that even ephemeral material is invested with a permanent charm. Much of his material is now over-familiar, and his message is often so gentle that it is easily unheeded, but his manner has the permanence of art.

It is little wonder that in "L'Envoy" he records a happy reception of his work, finding even his critics sympathetic. His mild fun with them is very unlike many another author's bitterness,—the objection of each to some part of his work if taken together would condemn the whole, but their praise if similarly added would commend it. Hence he continues, cheerfully, to write as he likes. Incidentally, he finds that he has hit upon something that we know to be the practical invention of the American magazine,—a miscellany, for different humors, not all for any, but something for each. He carries out this programme, as he states it, with such good humor and such engaging solicitude for the comfort and satisfaction of his readers that he at once groups himself with those intimate essayists from Montaigne to Holmes, who establish a personal, friendly relation with whoever turns their pages.

This gentle, friendly quality of Irving's has been so generally recognized that proportion demands greater emphasis upon the contrasting vigor and independence of his notes on racial and national traits. Of the two studies of the American Indian the first, "Traits of Indian Character", states seriously the argument that is put satirically in the *Knickerbocker History of New York*,—that the white man has not only despoiled the Indian of his possessions, but has also traduced his character. The sketch of "Philip of Pokanoket", or King Philip, is a detailed illustration of the soundness of Irving's double contention. Its high pressure of righteous indignation must be ignored by whoever would think that Irving lacked vigor. His gifts of selection and of satire, also, are evident here, as in the quotation from a clerical enemy of Philip's who was "in much doubt then, and afterwards seriously inquired, whether burning enemies alive could be consistent with humanity and the benevolent principles of the gospel". In short, Irving's Indian papers are creditable alike to his humanity and to his good judgment. His instinct for the development of our natural resources, moreover, made him appreciate the richness of the Indian as literary material, although he left it to Cooper, Parkman, and Longfellow to give that theme its full and conclusive treatment.

In "English Writers on America", English prejudice and misrepresentation and American resentment and hostility are boldly censured as alike unworthy of England's past and America's future. A penetrating analysis of the causes of the animosity leads to a thoughtful and eloquent plea for mutual sympathy and appreciation. The compactness and force of this paper admirably display Irving's attitude as a discriminating patriot, and his eminent fitness for his great service in explaining the one country to the other. This paper alone would have made Irving what Thackeray called him,— "the first ambassador of letters from the new world to the old". The portraiture of John Bull, in the paper bearing that title, is equally candid and kindly,—as observant and judicial as Emerson's "English Traits" and as appreciative and sympathetic as any of Henry James's "passionate pilgrims". Irving's personal practice throughout his life of the international amenity that he com-

mended helped, moreover, to make his preaching surprisingly acceptable and most happily influential in both countries.

The four critical papers,—two of them specific, two general,—illustrate more critical principles than at first appear. The first, concerning the now forgotten Liverpool historian, Roscoe, after some youthful surprise that authors should be subjected to ordinary human vicissitudes, notes, as Mr. Howells also has done, the irresistible energy of the few minds that are self-prompted, self-sustained, almost self-taught, in spite of local, financial, and social disadvantages sufficient to crush or kill the talent of others. Again, although it is scarcely true that authors in general are primarily ambitious and self-indulgent or at least selfishly exclusive, public spirit and benevolence such as Irving's are still sufficiently exceptional to deserve emphasis. The example of Roscoe is also well chosen for America in that his writing was not the product, exclusively, of wealth and leisure, but of occasional moments in the midst of affairs, and thus happily illustrative of a happy interrelation between life and letters. These themes are not exhaustively treated, but their vital character is displayed and their discovery is creditable to Irving's penetration. Indeed, he is apt to see so much at a glance that he feels little need of further inquiry or analysis. His problem presents itself chiefly as one of description or exposition. Hence, probably with a fluency that sometimes approaches the diffuse, the fanciful, and the sentimental, this paper glides to its end, not in critical estimate or conclusion, but in accounts of his author's financial fortune or adversity and a description of his spacious but now deserted mansion.

In the paper concerning "A Royal Poet" the writer finds himself in Windsor Castle, which impresses him chiefly as "a place full of storied and poetical associations",—another indication of his views of the past. The weather is "of that voluptuous and vernal kind which calls forth all of the latent romance of a man's temperament",—his mood, therefore, becomes one "of mere poetical susceptibility". This he deems especially suitable for a visit to the keep and for thoughts of its one-time prisoner, James the First, of Scotland. The consequent paper illustrates that variety of criticism which is frankly the chemistry

of a book and the critic's mind and mood. Many phrases,—such as “acute sensibility”, “enamored feeling”, “tender and indefinable reveries”, “elegant tastes”, “touching pathos”, “sweet morality”, “the necromantic power of the imagination”, “the fairy land of poetry”, and “magical lures of poetry and fiction”,—indicate again that among Irving's ingredients sensitive observation and quick emotion predominate over discrimination and judgment. Illustrations rather than reasons are presented, in a diction that is allusive, metaphorical, and suggestive, rather than precise. Circumstances, however, are not neglected, the emotion is genuine, and the ornate, much adjectived, often superlative, diction clothes actual realization of interesting truths, although the inexperience of the author frequently appears, as in his surprise that a king has emotions like himself. In this way King James,—in a mood of latency developed through seclusion—is shown to experience a double stimulus to literary creation. Reading Boëthius's *Consolation of Philosophy* he determines to record his own life in similar fashion; subjectively, the contrast between his confinement and the revel of the year without wakes desires for companionship and affection, both of which are met by a lovely lady walking in the garden beneath his window. Her departure leaves the poet in a vision,—whether real or fancied Irving does not determine except by concluding, temporarily, “let us not, however, reject every romance as being incompatible with real life”. This paper, like the preceding, concludes with description,—of James's subsequent history, his place of confinement, and his character as a man. Incidentally, there are appreciations of the value of brevity in the expression of pathos, of minute detail in picturesque description, of freshness, genuineness, delicacy, and urbanity in sentiment. There is also statement of an often-forgotten truth concerning literary influences,—“there are always, however, general features of resemblance in the works of contemporary authors, which are not so much borrowed from each other as from the times”, and there is unhesitating commendation for historical fiction as it is illustrated in the then new romances of Irving's great friend Sir Walter.

In the two papers of general criticism the author's attitude is

expressed in fanciful invention as well as in direct statement. In "The Art of Book-Making", old authors pounce out of their portraits to strip their modern despoilers of their borrowed thoughts and fancies,—a vivid as well as a logical argument for genuineness in matter and manner. "The Multiplicity of Literature", a colloquy with an old book, summarizes the plethora of publications, the low standard of public appreciation, the need for criticism, and, on the other hand, the permanence of books that penetrate to fundamental human nature, and the preëminent permanence of poetry in dealing with unchanging emotions, through selected thought and imagery, in the most terse and select language. It is interesting to find Irving, so exclusively a prose writer and so habitually a diffuse one, thus so rightly prize poetry as the finest distillate of the human spirit, a compact casket of ever brilliant jewels. So Irving displays almost inadvertently a fine although a yet rather undeveloped gift for literary criticism. Already he has a sound knowledge of literature,—its general laws and its particular phenomena, its source in personal temper and experience, its modification through social conditions and tendencies. He shows unusual appreciation of the usefulness of criticism in selecting the noteworthy from the negligible. He knows the perennial value of genuine emotional themes, of penetration and selection in observation, and of compactness and distinction in expression. For structure and arrangement he has little conscious care. His own experience of the rise and flow of the creative impulse, moreover, makes him realize his own gifts and limitations,—that he is inventive and diffuse rather than critical and systematic. Hence, as a personal rule of literary faith and practice, he esteems, above everything, the integrity and the delicacy of his impression, and makes his chief endeavor for fidelity and fullness of description and exposition. Almost his only restriction in procedure is a benevolence of intention,—at first spontaneous, but later reasoned and deliberate as well—and always a consequent urbanity of manner.

Of the four pieces descriptive of places, "Westminster Abbey" is in the vein of Addison's famous sketch in the *Spectator*, but much fuller of description. This description shows a cumulative



use of what might be called mood or tone-words,—such as ‘sober’, ‘melancholy’, ‘shadows’, ‘gloom’, and ‘mournful’,—all of which occur in the first six lines. Many polysyllables lend appropriate dignity and solemnity to the diction, and many adjectives conduce to a certain richness of effect. Much of the description, also, is in light and shade, with the contrast between outer sunshine and inner gloom, and the gradual decline of the illumination of the day. Visual impressions are indeed so plentiful that a sense of rich detail is everywhere present, but they are also so unarranged that they seem vague and lacking in solidity. Variations and contrasts of sound as well as of light and shade are also frequent,—the long reverberations of the abbey clock, the bell for prayers, the casual footsteps, the stir of life without, the silence of death within, the sounds of the church itself, with service, choir, and organ. Irving’s rich indefiniteness is particularly successful here in suggesting the organ music. Such impressions seem directly to give rise to the thought of the piece,—trophies and tombs, ambition and oblivion, the futility of pride, the equality of the grave, great men crowded from far and wide, friends and enemies, oppressors and oppressed, all reduced to monumental artifice to attract attention, except perhaps in the cases of a few authors who are remembered for their benevolence and their social service. Irving, on the whole, dearly loves the past, as he knows it through surviving customs, and through literary associations, which seldom go further back than Shakespeare. His appreciation of architecture and sculpture is quite unskilled: he knows practically nothing of artists, and schools, and periods. Such things are merely old or very old, they either please him perfectly or they appear “gothic” and barbarous; and yet, as in the matter of literary criticism, his untrained taste is so instinctively fine that he disesteems the bad although it be famous, and so esteems the excellent that some of the passages of this paper are still quoted by the guide-books as the best out of all that has been written concerning certain parts of the abbey. It may then seem meticulous to agree with Irving that his impressions in this paper are confused and indistinct. They do all that mere impressionism can. Selected impressions of people may be suggestive and

interpretative in themselves, but mere impressionism of things as mere realism lacks the scope of time and space, the interpretation of selection and arrangement, and all of the more abstract and logical qualities that are demanded for a complete and competent treatment of such a theme. We wonder at the mere repetition in various forms of the author's sole conclusion—a commonplace of the abbey since Addison's paper and probably for centuries before—"the emptiness of renown, and the certainty of oblivion". When the piece ends without any of the very obvious next steps in the intellectual argument, we come to prize it, as of all the essays in the world, one of the most untroubled by thought.

The paper on "London Antiques"—the Temple and the Charterhouse—is also scarcely more than pleasant impressionism which, to use Emerson's phrase for Lowell, sometimes has to pump. The latter half, especially, suffers in comparison with the far better-informed treatment of Lamb and of Thackeray. The paper on "Stratford-on-Avon", however, after a brief description of Shakespeare's birthplace, provides a very business-like and complete account of his tomb and its setting, and an especially welcome, because unusual, account of Sir Thomas Lucy's seat of Charlecote. And there is an admirable interpretative interlude on the character of the rural scenery that influenced Shakespeare's early life and much of his work. Here, also, is Irving's well-known praise of inns, which is written more at large in "The Inn Kitchen". At the outset, too, there is a statement of his imaginative creed,—“I am . . . a ready believer in relics, legends, and local anecdotes. . . . What is it to us, whether these stories be true or false, so long as we can persuade ourselves into a belief of them, and enjoy all the reality?” Finally, he confesses, “I like to deck out pictures for my own entertainment”, and concludes with praise of the poet who “spread the magic of his mind over the very face of nature, . . . gilded the dull realities of life with innocent illusions . . . and . . . beguiled the spirit . . . with all the cordial and cheerful sympathies of social life.”

“The Boar's Head Tavern” is literary criticism shading into description of manners. Here is parody of the unnecessarily

voluminous character of Shakespearean scholarship. There is also irony, in the introduction, the conclusion, and throughout, in phrases like "churchwardens and other mighty men", "fish-mongers of renown", and the attorney who never twisted the truth "except in the way of business". Nor must one forget, by way of humor of the incongruous, the story of the faithful ghost that responded to a call of "waiter", to the consternation of a tavern club. Here, also, is the soundest Shakespearean appreciation, in praise of the vividness, naturalness, force, and consistency that cause his characters to mingle in the memory with actual people,—a severe but sound standard for literary creation. This is enforced by the statements that heroes of fiction are often as interesting and valuable to us as heroes of history, and, specifically, that Falstaff is worth any number of actual great men. The reasons for praising that worthy are also well chosen,—he "has enlarged the boundaries of human enjoyment; he has added vast regions of wit and good humor,—and has bequeathed a never-failing inheritance of jolly laughter to make mankind merrier and better." Merrier and better are, by the way, to Irving, nearly synonymous. Thus, following the order of his impressions, the author seeks Falstaff's favorite inn, but finds only its site and sign, traditions of its passing, and certain apocryphal relics. The curiosity of his search, however, and his zest of discovery are worthy of Samuel Pepys, who himself might have written of a tavern: "this medley of kitchen, parlor, and hall . . . carried me back to earlier times, and pleased me." Irving's eye for salient detail in character is also rewarded, incidentally, by "the indisputable chronicler of the neighborhood . . . [with a] liberal communicative disposition", "the sexton, . . . a meek acquiescing little man; of a bowing, lowly habit", "the deputy organist who had a moist look out of the eye", and "the shabby [but sententious] gentleman in the red nose and oil-cloth hat." Such was the method that Dickens admired in Irving and followed himself.

"Little Britain" is more circumstantial, historic, and social, in its cumulative survey of the life of a London neighborhood. Its history and traces of former splendor surround the narrator's

lodgings after the fashion of some of Thackeray's sketches. Old manners and customs and beliefs abound. The apothecary and the cheesemonger are rival oracles. Burial societies and drinking clubs, St. Bartholomew's fair and the Lord Mayor's show, keep up the good old ways. But the aspiring family of a retired butcher has introduced social ambitions which spread until the family of a rich oilman leads an opposing party, all to the deterioration of genuine old manners before the gaucheries of money and fashion.

The author turns with relief to "Rural Life in England" as more happily representative of national character. Freedom and naturalness, the joys of garden and park, have become national ideals. Country recreations give health and manliness and democracy and make the country a delight in picturesqueness and domesticity, a paradise for the rich, and, as in "The Angler", for the poor as well. This doctrine of country life, although enforced by Irving's practice as well as his preaching, is just beginning to be generally appreciated in these United States. In "The Country Church" Irving found the centre of England's rural life,—checking with its traditional dignity the pretensions of the merely rich, a service that education and taste seem to be beginning to perform for us. Even a "Sunday in London" shows something of the same restfulness, religious consolation, social enjoyment, and love of fresh air. "Rural Funerals" and grave-yard customs strike Irving not only as displaying "the rich vein of melancholy which runs through English character", but also as illustrating the softening and refining influences of sorrow in daily life. If this be true, and it is hard to question, then European visitors are right in censuring what they now find characteristic of the United States, especially of our cities,—an anxious avoidance of thought about death. Here too, it may be, that Irving, like Bryant, has a moral lesson for the present day.

Irving's five Christmas pieces have a perennial charm in themselves, they are especially interpretative of his general literary intention, and they made a new selection and recombination of Christmas ideals so appealing as to have set the standard ever since. Of all old English customs those of Christmas seem to

him the most heartfelt, in the services of the church and in family reunions. The season turns one from outdoor nature to indoor social pleasures about the fireside, or in festivals surviving from more vigorous and more honest times. Thus English Christmas feasting, gifts, decorations, and song, yield increased charity, renewed family affection, and a general kindliness. These general observations are succeeded and illustrated by four descriptive papers. In "The Stage Coach" the author meets various holiday passengers, especially schoolboys going home for vacation. The coachman is truly Dickensian in manner, appearance, and costume. A coach trip is always cheerful, but especially so at this season of anticipation of family reunion, cheer in the inns, and welcome for guests, like that of Bracebridge Hall for the author. There, on Christmas Eve, he is to find an old-time Christmas. Passing the park walls and the greetings of the lodge keeper, the author and his host walk up the avenue, dear through long associations. Welcomed by many dogs, they reach the fine, varied old mansion, cheery with the Christmas songs and games of the servants. They are greeted by the benevolently whimsical squire, and by the family at cards and games in the hall, which is decorated in the good old fashion and has the yule-log burning, the whole epitomizing genuine and warm hospitality. Supper in the oaken dining room hung with family portraits, provides traditional Christmas Eve dishes and much mirth from a bachelor relative and Master Simon, a factotum of the squire's. His song, the music of an old harper, an after-supper dance, the jokes of a young collegian, a young officer's accomplishments, and the charms of the squire's ward, are succeeded by shaking hands for good-night and the writer's falling asleep amid antique furnishings to the sound of the village waits. Nowhere does Irving better elaborate his favorite theme of the happiness of the home and hospitality. On Christmas Day he is waked by a carol sung by the children, and pleased by the wintry landscape before his window. Prayers are read in the family chapel by the squire and Master Simon, and are concluded by a song of their making. A hearty breakfast is followed by a walk about the grounds, lively with dogs and brilliant with peacocks, which

are specially favored because of their ancient repute. Master Simon hurries away to rehearse the village choir, and the bell calls the group to church near the village. The parson is a college friend of the squire's and an antiquary, learned and punctilious. In the venerable church Master Simon leads the responses, but his village orchestra and choir do him little credit. A learned antiquarian sermon is followed by the cordial greetings of the congregation and a pleasant return walk, the squire, pleased at the evident comfort of the country folk, but lamenting the decay of many customs that made the poor happier and more content. In spite of the difficulty of reviving these customs, the villagers practise some of them to please the squire, and his entertainment changes their awkwardness into merriment,—a pleasant illustration of the working of Irving's favorite doctrine of the beneficence of benevolence. The Christmas Dinner, announced in ancient fashion by striking the rolling-pin upon the dresser, is served in the hall, to the sound of a harp, and smiled upon by the family portraits. The parson's formal grace being completed, the butler, with attendant candle-bearers, enters, to the sound of an old carol, with an imitation boar's head, which is elucidated by the parson. Other ancient dishes and decorations, like a peacock pie, are often merely imitations to please the squire. But a genuine wassail bowl is mixed by him and passed about with song, joke, and merriment. The ladies retiring, the squire tells his favorite tales, Master Simon sings, and the parson dozes until all return to the drawing room. Leaving the younger folks to games, the parson tells family legends, to the delight of the squire, until the youngsters enter as Christmas masks and dance a minuet to the satisfaction of all. All of this the author tells for its pleasantness and its contribution not to wisdom but to good humor. He concludes in a passage that is interpretative not only of these papers but of the whole book and of the author's general literary intention as well, — "What, after all, is the mite of wisdom that I could throw into the mass of knowledge. If, however, I can rub out one wrinkle from the brow of care, or beguile the heavy heart of one moment of sorrow,—prompt a benevolent view of human nature, and make my reader more in a good humor with his fellow

beings and himself, surely, surely I shall not then have written entirely in vain."

The final category of papers in the *Sketch Book*, the experiments in fiction, are of two sorts,—tales of sentiment and of mystery. The tales of sentiment may be dismissed briefly. "The Broken Heart"—of a bereaved wife—and "The Pride of the Village"—of a deserted sweetheart—deal with matters in which Irving was not expert, in a manner that suggests the fanciful bachelordom of which some people accuse Mr. Henry James. They are, moreover, based upon the no longer popular theory that "a woman's whole life is a history of her affections." The others, "The Wife"—who bore financial reverses happily—and "The Widow and Her Son"—a decrepit mother's sadness over her boy's sickness, wounds, and death,—these furnish promising themes, but are merely very slender statements of them and of their appeals to sentiment or pathos, without either analysis or any fulness of concrete exposition. The tales of mystery, however, present the great names of "The Spectre Bridegroom", "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", and "Rip Van Winkle".

"The Spectre Bridegroom" is frankly a retelling of a famous old story,—a French tale in a German setting. Briefly, the betrothed of the Baron's daughter is killed, a companion impersonates his spirit, and carries off the bride. The bride and bridegroom are sketched merely in outline, but the peremptory old baron and his setting, and the maiden aunts with their ridiculous tutelage, are pictured fully and picturesquely with all of Irving's gifts for the humor of the grotesque in character. The preparations for the wedding, the surprise at the absence of the lover, the atmosphere of ghostly stories, all admirably lead up to the companion's announcing himself as a spectre. With similar rapidity and emotional logic are managed the spectre's return to frighten the aunts from the niece's chamber, and again to carry away his sudden sweetheart who, it must be remembered, had never seen the real bridegroom; and, finally, the return of the wedded pair to receive the parental blessing. Throughout we have Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" until the mystery becomes clear. In conclusion,

we are satisfied with the explanation and with the success of the trick, with the outwitting of the blustering baron and the foolish aunts, and finally, with the happy union of the lovers, and we are by exclusion gradually made to forget the sorrows of the original bridegroom, who has to be murdered in order that the story may be worth the telling. The whole is a masterpiece of the technique of narration.

"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is very similar in action,—the bold bridegroom wins the willing fair through a fabricated mystery that deceives the foolish, who is here the rival swain. Again the story is an old one in a new setting. And again the mystery is explained, as it is not, by the way, in "Rip". Here, however, the action, although highly successful, is yet less so than the picturing of the setting and the masterly depiction of character, both of which make the "Legend" the fullest canvas in the *Sketch Book*. It is half again as long as "Rip". The setting of the tale is pictured with a wealth of visible and audible detail. Actual coves and valleys and other natural features of the lower Hudson region are filled with little pictures of all the details of human habitation, both out of doors and in. The whole is bathed in a mellow atmosphere of drowsy stillness, emphasized by the murmur of tranquillity. The manners of the characters, like Cooper's, moreover, present a real picture of the times, particularly of the Dutch abundance and content so well displayed in the *Knickerbocker History of New York*. The description of the quilting and the recounting of the legendary lore are no less admirable in themselves than in their contribution to the action. The dominance of the particular tale of the headless horseman is a triumph of what Poe called 'tone'. The action, also, as in "Rip", perfectly blends the subjective and the objective. Ichabod Crane's anxieties,—at night-sounds, at the sight of fireflies, at the thump of a blundering beetle, at the crunch of his steps on the snow, at the whiff of the wind, at the sight of snow-shrouded bushes,—these are as real as anything in the tale. The action, also, is well mingled and intensified by Ichabod's rejection by Katrina just before his fright. The atmosphere of superstition and the brooding dominance of the headless horseman seem almost of themselves to become con-



crete in the story, and to focus the unfortunate hero's saturation with the region's superstitions, his dismal mood, the gloomy road, the dark, hushed night, with all its mysterious shadows and sounds, into the intense although humorous crisis, and the rapid conclusion. But even the ten pages of rapid action must yield the palm to the twenty of leisurely description. This proportion of two parts of description to one of narrative also holds good for "Rip", thus indicating that Irving happened upon the short story for America merely by carrying description through setting and character into action. All the characters in the "Legend" except Ichabod are merely sketched, but they are clear and complete, especially the blooming and coquettish Katrina, her thriving, placid father, and the triumphant Brom, at the head of his boisterous crew. The negro messenger and the negro musician show, too, that Irving, like Cooper, saw the promise of that race for our literature. But Ichabod Crane himself is a masterpiece of grotesque consistency made real to our eyes and ears and sympathies through a wealth of precise detail. Here Irving's distaste for analysis, a thing so often hurtful in character drawing—aids him to an undiluted product of evocation. Thus Ichabod's name is highly appropriate and suggestive yet not improbable. His length and looseness, his small head and large feet, his grotesque and ill-assorted features, are perfect hyperbole and yet quite possible. His clothing and even his borrowed horse are equally appropriate. His insatiable and enthusiastic hunger, his social service and standing as a learned, leisurely, accomplished person who can carry current gossip and who loves to tell old tales,—all of these traits, so delightful in themselves, culminate in a wonderfully consistent character. Ichabod is, moreover, consistent in action,—whether walking, riding, dancing, or singing; even when frightened out of his wits. His sentiment and his ambition, his folly and his persistence, are admirably contrasted traits. Truly "an odd mixture of small shrewdness and simple credulity", as Irving sums him up, "a happy mixture of pliability and perseverance—yielding, but tough". Withal we are made to know him so well that, as with some of the people of Dickens, we should not be surprised to meet him in the flesh. If, in fine, Ichabod Crane is not "one

of the great prize men of fiction" it is merely because a brief sketch does not give him scope enough. He is unquestionably a real creation, breathing the breath of life.

Rip Van Winkle, of course, is one of those rare characters in fiction that transcend mere books and bookishness and mingle with the daily life of men. This may be due partly to his dramatization, but many people know him who have neither read the *Sketch Book* nor had the privilege of seeing Mr. Jefferson's impersonation. He is evoked so fully and consistently that he illustrates Mr. Zangwill's paradox that "fiction is the highest form of truth." Again we have a world-old, world-wide story,—here of the familiar mystery of sleep—with new characters and new setting. It is definitely located in the Catskills by the Hudson that Irving loved. Nature and weather, place and time, character and manners, are all vividly presented in Irving's characteristic manner, of sweeping general description made real by selected 'bits' that are full of salient detail. The little Dutch village is pictured with the affection of Knickerbocker, and its modifications under democracy with Knickerbocker's searching satire. Rip is as consistently inconsistent as Ichabod, and his fortune flows as inevitably from his nature. His good nature and kindness bring him friends and fame; because of his idleness and perversity he is poor and hen-pecked. We pardon his faults because we know and understand him so thoroughly,—his nature and appearance, his words and actions, the words and actions of others to and concerning him. Even his dog is interpretative of his character. Similarly, we lack sympathy with Dame Van Winkle in her thoroughly justified severity, because we see her only in one unlovely aspect. Rip's adventure with the Dutchmen, the flagon, and the twenty years' sleep we accept as a charming fiction, a bit of race-and-nature mythology with true imaginative validity. If one must rationalize it, it is merely a pleasant way of putting the dramatist's "twenty years later", without disturbing the logic of events. The most realistic could scarcely censure the device, for its working out displays all of Irving's best artistry of completeness of detail arranged into a unified whole. There is a similar balance of leisure and rapidity in the movement; of grace and

vigor, of raciness and richness in the diction. And aside from its happiness in presenting perfect examples of Irving's description, characterization, structure, and style, Rip is equally representative of Irving's humor of exaggeration, incongruity, and irony; his pathos of situation, always restrained in statement; and, above all, of his at first spontaneous and afterward deliberate solution of life,—the creed of good humor and universal kindliness.

Such an exposition of such a work as the *Sketch Book* constitutes its highest praise. Intellectually, Irving was not analytic, not logical, not even very thoughtful. His cultivation, according to present standards, lacked history, art, perhaps even literature. His attitude, although genuine and by no means without vigor, was frankly romantic. But his manner, traditionally dignified and ornate, he made also flexible and graceful, free and varied. His gifts were notable in their sensitive, selective, and appreciative vision; their clear, full, and picturesque description and exposition. His message, in both his life and work, was one of esteem for the good things of life and regard for one's fellows,—a truly eclectic and democratic teaching from one who was truly patriotic as only a cosmopolitan can be. With this equipment, his accomplishment was large and high. He practically invented the short-story and the magazine, he permanently revived the Christmas spirit and he developed international amenity, he taught us and the world to appreciate our scenery and history, our cosmopolitan population and their manners. He was notably successful in narration, he created great characters in fiction, and he left a permanent lesson and example of simplicity, sincerity, and kindliness. All of this in the *Sketch Book*.

There are those that prefer the unchastened spontaneity of the earlier *Knickerbocker*, or the superior maturity and finish of the *Alhambra*. Yet others prefer *Bracebridge Hall*, *The Tales of a Traveller*, or the *Life of Goldsmith*. Indeed, every one of Irving's books has its champions, and his work is fairly extensive. It is one of the graces of the world of letters that in it there is no obligation for anybody to like anything. Whosoever will, however, may find in Irving the continuer of a fine tradi-

tion, a distinguished stylist, an inventor of notable new forms, an appreciator of life; the creator of characters, actions, and conceptions influential in life as well as letters; the first famous American man of letters; and a benevolent and charming personality. To like him and to continue to like him is not only a privilege, but a mark of both character and cultivation.

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